



## Paddling the Big Thicket

With its many miles of creeks, bayous, and river, Big Thicket National Preserve is an ideal place to explore by canoe and kayak. Village Creek and the Neches River are the two most popular waterways in the preserve, providing many different trip options for paddlers of all experience levels. Canoeists and kayakers can explore these areas on trips ranging from a half-day to several days.

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### Village Creek

Recently designated an official Texas Paddling Trail, Village Creek winds past beautiful white-sand beaches that are perfect for picknicking. Bald cypress, tupelo, and other tall shady trees line the creek banks. Several access points along the creek allow paddlers to make trips of varying lengths. Please refer to the Big Thicket National Preserve map for the locations listed here.

	<u>Distance</u>	<u>Approximate time</u>
FM 418 to Hwy 327:	8.6 miles	4 to 6 hours
Hwy 327 to Baby Galvez:	2.1 miles	2 to 3 hours
Baby Galvez to Hwy 96:	7.1 miles	3 to 5 hours
Hwy 96 to Village Creek State Park:	3.2 miles	2 to 3 hours

While generally very calm, Village Creek is a free-flowing waterway with no dams, so water levels can vary considerably. During low water levels paddlers should expect to encounter exposed sandbars and logs across the creek. High water after heavy rains creates hazardous conditions. Check water levels before setting out on your trip.

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### Neches River

Big Thicket National Preserve manages 80 miles of the Neches River from Town Bluff, just below B.A. Steinhagen Lake, to Beaumont. Distances between boat ramps vary from 10 to 40 miles. The river flows through bottomland hardwood forests for much of this distance, but lakes and bayous become more common further south. These provide interesting side trips, and many can be explored in less than a day without requiring a shuttle.

One good day trip begins and ends at the LNVA Saltwater Barrier, located at the end of Bigner Street in Beaumont. From here, paddlers can go upstream on the Neches to Pine Island Bayou and Cooks Lake which are fun to explore, with many shady alcoves of majestic bald cypress trees. With a map and compass or GPS, it is possible to navigate from Cooks Lake through the cypress to Scatterman Lake then return to the put-in via the Neches River. Ask about maps and directions at the Big Thicket National Preserve Visitor Center, as it is easy to get lost in the Cooks Lake area.

Paddlers planning longer trips may want to refer to the [Neches River User Guide](#), sold at the Big Thicket National Preserve Visitor Center. It provides maps, descriptions, and good information on the natural and cultural history of the Neches River area. The Visitor Center also provides a free brochure on canoing the Neches River.

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## Camping

The Village Creek and Neches River Corridors are managed by Big Thicket National Preserve. However, the lands outside the corridors belong to private landowners. Please limit your recreational use to the waterways and sandbars, and never trespass onto private property.

Camping is allowed on sandbars along Village Creek and the Neches River. Free camping permits are required; contact Big Thicket National Preserve at (409) 951-6700 for more information.

Camping is NOT allowed in the following areas:

- Any posted as a Day Use Areas, including the Lakeview Sandbar on the Neches River;
- The Beaumont Unit and lands above the sandbars in the Neches Bottom and Jack Gore Baygall Unit during hunting season;
- The Roy E. Larsen Sandyland Sanctuary above the sandbars; and
- Any areas posted as private property.

Village Creek State Park in Lumberton has developed camping facilities. Reservations can be made by calling (512) 389-8900 or by visiting their website at [www.texasstateparks.org](http://www.texasstateparks.org).

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## Boat Rental and Shuttle Services

Local outfitters offer canoe and kayak rentals and shuttle services to paddlers and campers along Village Creek and the Neches River. Advance reservations are encouraged, especially in the peak season (early March through late October). Paddlers planning to use their own boats can contact an outfitter to set up shuttle service and ask for local information prior to their arrival. The outfitters are knowledgeable about creek conditions and can suggest a trip to match your ability and available time.

Eastex Canoe Trails – 1698 U.S. Highway 96 South, Silsbee, Texas 77656  
(409) 385-4700      [www.eastexcanoes.com](http://www.eastexcanoes.com)

Pineywoods Outfitters – 921 S. Main Str., Lumberton, Texas 77657  
(409) 751-0911      [www.canoetexas.com](http://www.canoetexas.com)

Big Thicket Outfitters – 115 Connolly Rd, Vidor, Texas  
(409) 786-1884      [www.bigthicketoutfitters.com](http://www.bigthicketoutfitters.com)

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## Contact Information

Please contact one of the following agencies for more information on planning a trip to the Big Thicket:

Big Thicket National Preserve    (409) 951-6700      [www.nps.gov/bith](http://www.nps.gov/bith)

Village Creek State Park      (409) 755-7322      [www.texasstateparks.org](http://www.texasstateparks.org)

The Nature Conservancy, Roy E. Larsen Sandyland Sanctuary  
(409) 781-5071      [www.nature.org/texas](http://www.nature.org/texas)

Water levels:    Village Creek: <http://waterdata.usgs.gov/nwis/uv?08041500>  
                         Neches River: <http://waterdata.usgs.gov/nwis/uv?08041000>

### Emergency Numbers

Police, Fire, and EMS – 911

Big Thicket Park Watch – (800) 793-6566

Hardin County Sheriff – (409) 246-5100

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